THE FUTURE OF FREEMASONRY

The Concluding Article of a Series on Ancient Freemasonry and Present Day Problems

BY BRO. HERBERT HUNGERFORD Author of *Seeing Both Sides of Yourself*

In this final article Bro. Hungerford points out the reasons for an optimistic outlook in regard to the future of the Craft. The old self-gratulatory spirit is passing away. Thinking brethren everywhere are comparing our practice with our Ideals in growing discontent; and in this growing dissatisfaction and disinclination to rest upon the laurels of the past lies the great hope for the future. For the Pharisee who thanks God that he is not as other men are there is no hope, it was to the Publican who confessed his sins that the promise of the future was given.

OUR PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE in attempting this somewhat superficial survey of our ancient institution and its relations to some of the outstanding problems of our own times has been to formulate, or, at least, to suggest some forecast of the future of Freemasonry.

In this brief summing-up of the series, please bear in mind the point previously mentioned so frequently, that our purpose is far more suggestive than conclusive. In brief, as our previous articles have attempted to stimulate your own thinking along the lines of our discussion rather than to present complete and definite plans and programs to be carried out, so this final article will not undertake to prophesy future events in Freemasonry, but will be confined to pointing out certain observable tendencies and trends.

I certainly have no desire to pose as a prophet. Yet, I have no hesitancy in expressing my faith, or, at least, my hopes regarding the future possibilities of Freemasonry, based upon observation and study of our past progress and our present activities.

The Importance of Ideals

Some of the brethren who have participated in this series of discussions by contributing their criticisms or viewpoints on various topics we have touched upon, have raised the objection that the writer's attitude has been too idealistic; that he has been advocating principles and practices of perfection far beyond the power and abilities of the poor, frail mortals comprising the membership of our fraternity to live up to in the regular course of their customary activities.

Admitting that we have been advocating ideals of achievement and practices in human relationships far above the customary behavior of ordinary human beings, still we do not admit that such criticism of our attitude is justified, because we maintain that the ideals of our institution are not one whit lower than our articles have represented them. Furthermore, when the far-seeing founders of our fraternity established it as an art to be practiced, they thereby indicated the fact that Freemasonry was to be regarded as an idealistic institution. Every art is a striving towards certain ideals of perfection which are never exactly and completely attained. There are standards of perfection in all fields of activity. Those who parade these standards and uphold the highest ideals as the goal to be aimed at by the

votaries of any order, surely should not be criticized as being "too visionary." Bear in mind the fact that "where there is no vision, the people perish."

The key-note of our theme throughout this series has been our conviction that, by shifting the emphasis in our Masonic programs so that less attention is paid to non-essential or side-line activities and our major effort given to the promotion of better understanding of the fundamental principles of Freemasonry and to the encouragement of a more universal practicing among the Craft of the true art of Freemasonry, we would thereby make a large contribution towards the solution of many of the world's problems in religion, education, politics and business.

In this final article, therefore, I propose to point out a few activities which seem to me to be indications of hopeful endeavor towards the goals of highest achievement. Because I have not hesitated to call attention to some of the faults and shortcomings of modern Masonic activities, some of my readers, possibly, may have classed me as a pessimistic critic. Possibly, however, after you have read my views as to the trends and prospects of our fraternity, you will change your opinion and put me down as "one of those incurable optimists." If you do, I shall not greatly object.

The High Repute of Freemasonry

To begin with, let me state that it is my sincere opinion, based upon a considerable amount of observation on this particular matter, that the vast majority of people in all walks of life today, outside of our Craft, look upon the Masonic Order as the greatest of all fraternities. I am not using the term as referring chiefly to size and extensiveness. I estimate that at least nine persons out of every ten hold Freemasonry in the highest esteem. If my observations are fairly accurate, the critics of Freemasonry, outside the Craft today, are few and their criticisms are, usually, feeble or futile. The caustic rantings of a few cantankerous professional scolds or fault-finders, such as Ed Howe or Hank Mencken, because some of us may find pleasure in rigging ourselves out in somewhat showy regalia, or in enjoying any of the other innocent indulgences of our various ceremonials, are but a drop in the bucket as compared to the high praise and almost universal commendation that Freemasonry receives from the general public.

Without apology for what might appear to be a somewhat egotistic attitude towards our Craft, I have no hesitancy in affirming my belief that Freemasonry is deserving of the high place in the esteem of the world that it has won for itself. It really is, I believe, the greatest fraternity in the world.

Furthermore, I regard it as greater today than ever in its history. Not for one minute do I think that modern Freemasonry is resting upon laurels of the past. Neither do I admit that there ever was a period in the history of the Craft when more of its members were deeply and sincerely concerned with the best ways of maintaining and promoting the highest and noblest ideals of the institution.

If you regard this optimistic viewpoint at variance with the criticisms of our Order that have been presented in our previous articles, let me hasten to show you why I believe these seemingly opposite points of view in reality are in perfect harmony. Freemasonry today would be facing a serious crisis if the leaders in Masonic endeavors and activity held the same views that the world at large outside the Craft apparently holds. The wise observation that it is a dangerous condition when "all men speak well of you" applies to social groups as well as to individuals.

But, my personal observation leads to the opinion that the more thoughtful members of our fraternity are far from complacent regarding the present conditions of the Craft. Everywhere I come into touch with Masonic leaders, I find plenty of evidence of wholesome dissatisfaction which I regard as the most hopeful and healthy portent for the future of Freemasonry.

Many Cities Within Our Craft

There are thousands of Masonic leaders, I believe, who are diligently and sincerely seeking ways and means of applying the teachings of Freemasonry to the solution of present day problems. The many comments I have received on this series of articles coming from every section of the country, is one indication of this. Another of much greater significance is the generally critical tone of the principal articles in the Masonic press everywhere, excepting in the few back-patting and personal sheets which are too few and insignificant to be deserving of serious attention.

During the several years I was connected with the staff of speakers of the Masonic Bureau of Educational and Social Service of New York State, I was afforded considerable opportunity of observing the sort of speeches which made the biggest hits with the brethren. It appeared to me as a most gratifying fact that the old back-patting palaver style of speech was not applauded or appreciated nearly as much as the plain talks containing really constructive criticism and practical suggestions for the improvement of the Order.

Unless I have failed to read aright the signs of the times, Freemasonry is on the verge of the greatest era in the history of the institution. The unusual and not altogether beneficial conditions in the Craft which came as an aftermath of the world war are now passing. We are beginning to get away from the notion that progress is denoted by increase in numbers. We are losing our liking for big drives and mass movements, the direct resultant of the various drives and campaigns which were so necessary a part of war activities. We are beginning to think in terms of Masonic quality rather than mere quantity.

In brief, I am confident that we are beginning to shift the emphasis in our Masonic programs, so that in a steadily increasing number of Lodges, the activities are being centered upon the real fundamentals of our great Masonic teachings, instead of being concerned chiefly with the least important features of Masonic endeavor.

Please do not misunderstand that I am pretending that, throughout the Craft generally, we have already Shifted the emphasis. But I do insist that the tendency in this direction is plainly discernable. It has been my privilege to visit quite a number of lodges and to discuss the conditions of our Craft with a good many devoted brethren in all parts of the country. Everywhere the same thought has been uppermost in the minds of Masonic leaders: What can be done to encourage a larger percentage of our members to practice the real art of Freemasonry and live in accord with true Masonic teachings ?

There is a practical answer to this question, I sincerely believe; an answer that has been tried and proven worthy. Granting the fact that our discussions in this series have only scratched the surface and have not delved deeply into historical research or social or economic analysis; still, I feel sure every reader who has followed the series will admit that they have all pointed in one direction.

The point repeatedly emphasized is that no changes or modifications are necessary in the purpose, plans or programs of Freemasonry in order to answer the above vital question in a plain and practical

way. All we need to do is to continue the shifting of the emphasis in our Masonic programs and activities in the ways already noted as being the tendency in many Lodges.

Getting right down to brass tacks, I contend, that the Masonic Study Club Movement, as fostered and directed by The National Masonic Research Society, offers the most effective answer to the question as to how any Lodge or any group of really interested brethren may stimulate and encourage the more widespread practice of the art of Freemasonry among all their fellows and brothers.

If you are anxious to develop the true Masonic spirit among the members of your Lodge, I doubt if you can find a more satisfactory and certain way of accomplishing this commendable aim than by organizing a Study Club. You are surely aware of the difficulty of deeply impressing the principles and teachings of Freemasonry through the frequently hurried administering of initiatory rites. Neither does sitting on the side lines listening to these ceremonials or even participating in them, bring out clearly and completely the noble ideals and practical teachings of our Order. Nor will a few brief talks or lectures by well-informed brethren fully accomplish this objective. All these things will help, of course, yet you will find no other means as effective in teaching Masonic ideals and inculcating the practices of Freemasonry as organizing and conducting a regular course of readings and discussions.

You will note, therefore, that although we have reached the final discussion in our series on Ancient Freemasonry and Present Day Problems, we have really just begun our endeavors towards the practical application of the points we have attempted to present during this series.

In accepting the appointment as sort of a chairman for The Masonic Study Club Forum of THE BUILDER and general campaign manager for the extension of the Study Club Movement, I admit my deep appreciation of the honor and privilege of this service, but also wish to express my Obligations to, and my dependence upon the counsel, criticism and cooperation of my brethren in all parts of the country who have shown so much interest and given such splendid encouragement to all efforts on behalf of the extension of Masonic education. If those who have been encouraging my efforts in this series will continue their cooperation by helping to awaken interest in the Study Club Movement among the Craft everywhere and will also aid in organizing, conducting and passing along, through our Study Club Forum, any practical pointers brought out by actual Study Club activities, I certainly shall have no fears regarding the future of Freemasonry.

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